Leadership Palette

Apple University

Defining the Palette

At all levels within Apple there are leaders: Those who embody qualities that are vital and, in many ways, unique to Apple culture. The Leadership Palette captures key attributes of leaders at Apple that reflect and reinforce what makes this company run. We've provided a Palette—because no project or role requires all the Attributes all the time.

How to use it

The Palette can help you achieve better results, easier. The Attributes are meant to inspire and to invite reflection.

- They provide language to help you check your thinking, or someone else's.
- They guide conversations by introducing a common vocabulary.
- They can help you get focused, get everyone on the same page, and assess effectiveness.

Uncommon Sense

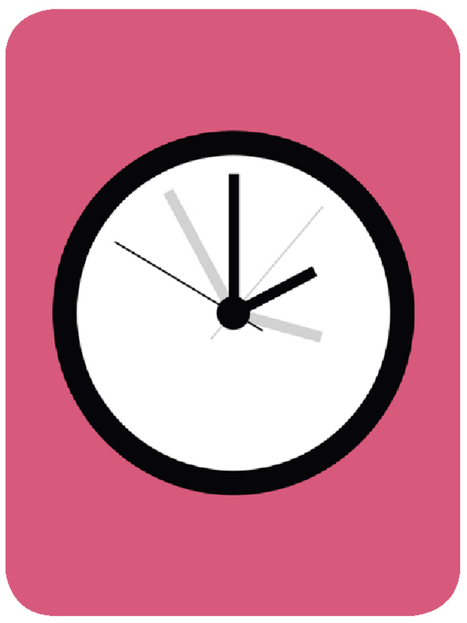
Uncommon sense is about seeing what is evident but not recognized. It is discerning what will make sense in hindsight, and having the confidence to move forward in spite of skepticism.

Think clearly

For almost any decision, there are many relevant considerations, but it's likely that only a few are truly important enough to guide the way forward. Thinking clearly is about distilling big decisions down to their determinative factors. It involves a hard look at the data and a healthy dose of intuition.

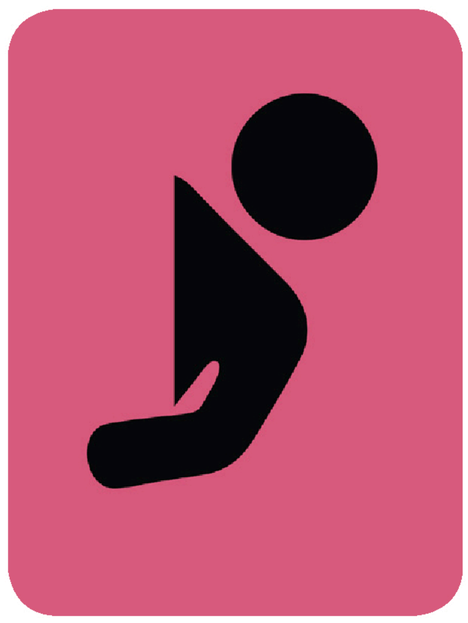
Focus and simplify

When an approach to something feels too complicated to be right, it probably is. Solving problems requires both stripping out what is not essential and identifying what is. Focusing and simplifying takes concentrated attention and a persistent need to get to the heart of the matter.



Sense the moment

From pitching new ideas to launching new products, sensing the moment means understanding the subtleties of good timing. It's knowing when to hold back and when to engage, how to push without rushing, and when to stop.



See around corners

Focusing exclusively on current problems and opportunities means missing even bigger problems and opportunities ahead. Seeing around corners is looking beyond daily demands and identifying trajectories —from the technological to the organizational to the political —that will be critical in the future.

Imaginative Intelligence

Imaginative intelligence is the ability to create something that does not exist, but should. It is the product of deep functional expertise and bursts of ingenuity. It doesn't happen through creativity or brains alone; it requires both imagination and intelligence.

Innovate down to the details

At Apple we focus on getting the big ideas right, but our love is in the details. Our customers' experiences consist of many moments of actual or potential interaction with our products and services. Each of these is an opportunity to surprise and delight through an innovative, thoughtful detail.

Demand difference

Doing what's right for Apple means avoiding common approaches and "best practices." Demanding difference is about seeking a new path forward, charting a course for Apple that others can only follow.

Stay curious

Accepting everything at face value is a recipe for mediocrity. Staying curious means continually asking why and why not. It's about being inquisitive in pursuit of excellence, and never feeling like you've arrived.

Approach problems flexibly

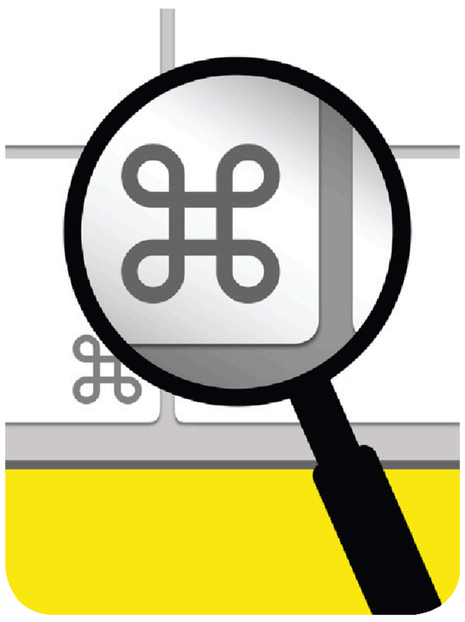
Approaching problems flexibly begins with the recognition that we do things differently at Apple. As a result, the best solution isn't always the one that seems easiest or most direct. Tackling challenges successfully here requires a willingness to adapt and modify your approach, without compromising on the outcome.

Cultural Tenacity

Cultural tenacity is the commitment to uphold what makes Apple, Apple. It means behaving in a way that is consistent with the culture, ideals, and values of this organization.

Fight for excellence

Fighting for excellence is about resisting the gravitational pull of mediocrity. It involves being dead tired and still pushing yourself, and others, to get it right, every time.

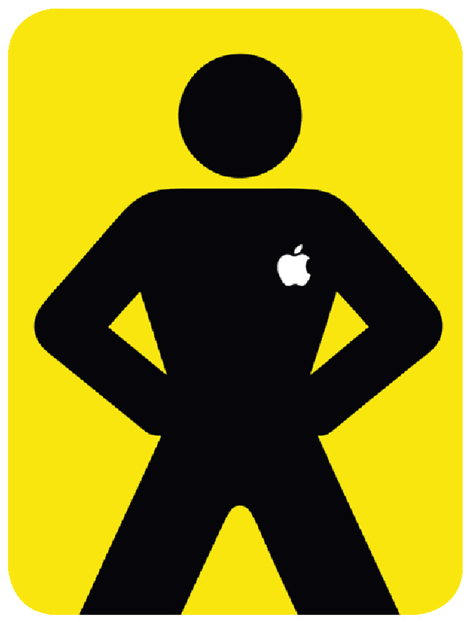


Obsess over the customer experience

Obsessing over the customer experience involves experiencing our products and services as our customers do. It enables us to not only meet our customers' expectations, but to exceed them.

Wrestle with Apple's premises

There's no cheat sheet for Apple's culture. Wrestling with our premises means taking time to understand who we are based on what we do. It also means grappling with and seeking to reconcile the inevitable conflicts in our culture.



Demonstrate integrity

Apple doesn't cut corners, in products or in business. Demonstrating integrity means driving quality, honesty, and accountability in all that we do, and actively modeling high standards in matters great and small.

Accountability Without Control

Being responsible for the success of a project can be challenging when you don't oversee all the pieces. Accountability without control works when we deliver on our own expertise, trust others to deliver on theirs, and ensure a successful outcome through deep collaboration.

Drive what matters

Driving what matters is not just about selecting the right tasks on which to focus from among the multiple things competing for your attention. It's about ensuring that others similarly zero in on what's critical and let go of what isn't.

Cut through ambiguity

Things at Apple aren't always clear. Cutting through ambiguity means finding the right path despite haziness or uncertainty. It's also about blazing that path, rather than waiting on others or deferring responsibility.

Own the hard calls

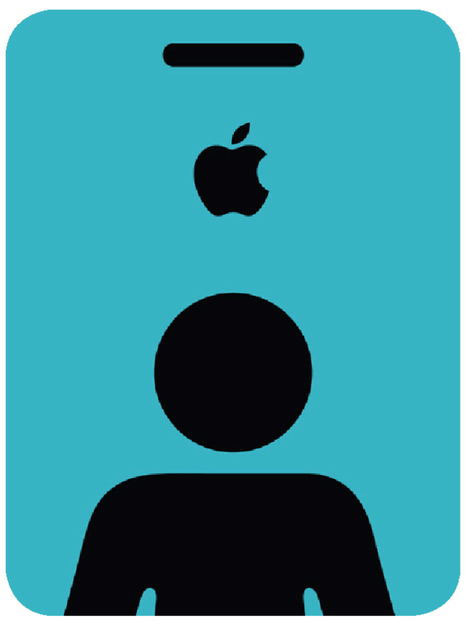
Owning the hard calls means making tough decisions and standing behind them. It includes buy-in, negotiation, push-back, push-through—and sometimes pulling the plug on a project in which considerable time and energy has been invested.

Listen, challenge, and commit

Listening is the first step in a healthy debate. Understanding others' perspectives allows you to challenge them productively. But once a decision is made, whether or not it was yours, committing to it is what moves us forward.

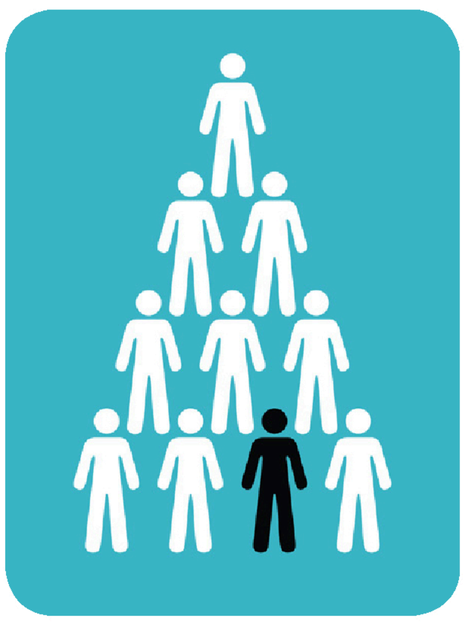
Capacity to Connect

The capacity to connect with others is vital to making them feel recognized, valued, and engaged enough to do their best work. It's not just charisma—it's authenticity, humility, and a willingness to go beyond your comfort zone.



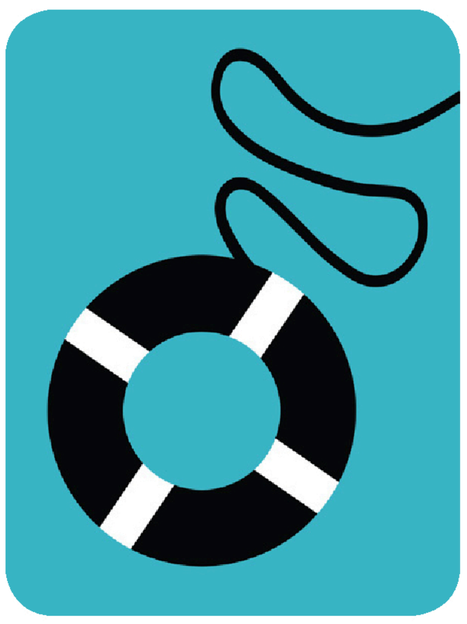
Know people

Getting things done at Apple requires knowing people—and *knowing* people. First, you need to know the right people; those whose involvement is necessary to get something done. Then, you need to understand what they care about to effectively engage them in what you are trying to accomplish.



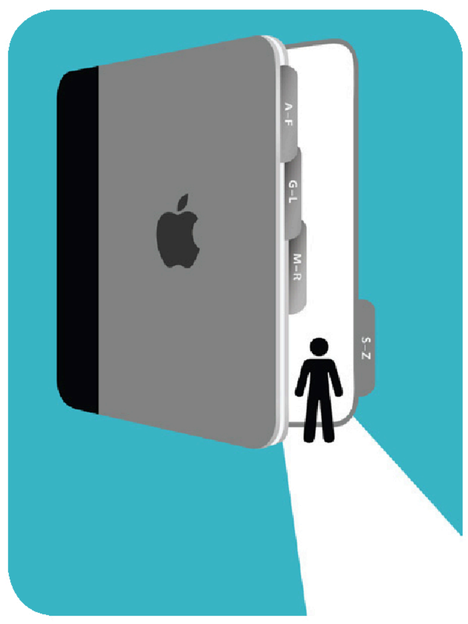
Foster trust

Fostering trust comes from delivering on your expertise, doing what you say you'll do, and quickly acknowledging mistakes. It's letting others grow through their own experiences and providing honest, productive feedback along the way.



Give help

Giving help is about recognizing that we all depend on each other. It means going out of your way to help someone else succeed, without worrying about what's in it for you.



Seek expertise and experience

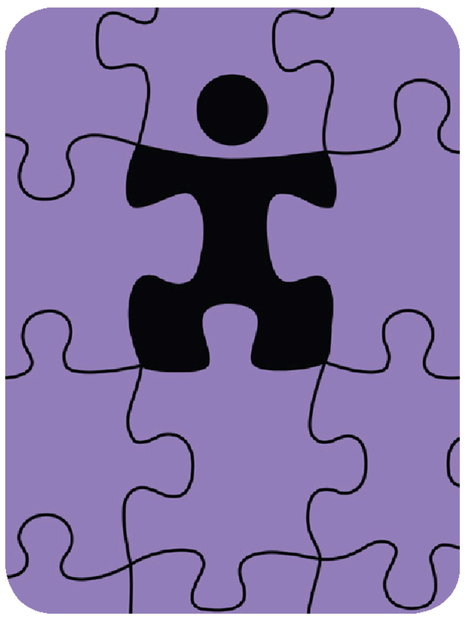
We all have something to learn. Seeking expertise and experience is about recognizing our shortcomings and supplementing them with the talents of others. It means caring deeply enough about the end result to learn to do it right.

Team Catalyst

Apple is built on great teams. Being an effective leader here depends on assembling the right people, motivating them, and getting them to collaborate. Your impact on the team should be felt across the organization, and continue long after you leave.

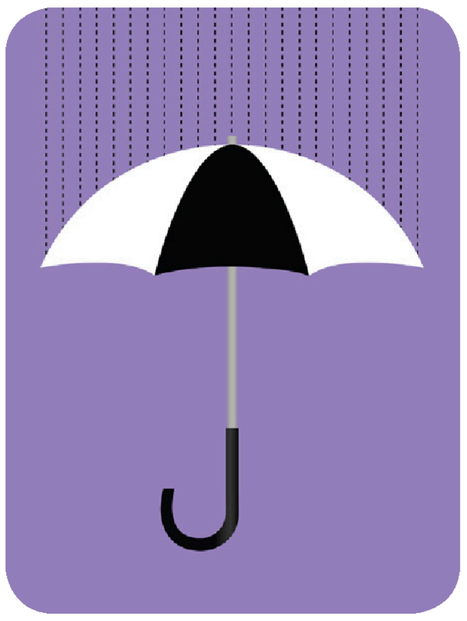
Attract, develop, and share talent

It feels good to lead a winning team. But recognizing, developing, and showcasing others' talents, and helping them succeed—whether on your team or beyond—has a much more lasting impact on the organization.



Make action meaningful

Making action meaningful means helping your team members appreciate that they're part of something bigger. It's instilling a sense of pride in the contribution they're making, regardless of its size or scope.



Instill candor and resilience

Achieving excellence requires honesty about what is not excellent. Instilling candor and resilience is about fostering that honesty—pushing people to create something greater rather than getting discouraged.

Plan for scale and succession

Good leaders think beyond the short-term wins and needs of the moment. They prepare their people and their organizations for the new challenges that arise from succession and from changes in scale and scope.